

Second Report on
The Jason Strevell House
Located in Pontiac, Illinois
September 18, 2012
By Tom Vance

Introduction

In 2009 I made a visit to Pontiac, Illinois to evaluate and make recommendations on the Jason Strevell House. Since that time, considerable work has been done on the exterior restoration of the house. Work has also been done on the interior to remove later materials such as drop ceilings, carpet, wall paper, closets and a bathroom to uncover more of the original interior fabric of the house.

On September 18th, I made a return visit to look at the interior and help determine how to proceed with the structural research and restoration. There was a limited amount of time allowing for only a cursory examination.

Determinations made during the visit are as follows:

East Parlor & Adjoining Room

The paneling had been removed in the east parlor revealing several layers of wall paper and underneath that, the original dark green paint. The arched doorway and wall dividing the room appears to be original to the construction but a closer examination needs to be made. The configuration of the chimney in these rooms is still unknown. There should be some evidence of the chimney on the wall when wall paper is removed.



The bathroom has been removed from the smaller north room, revealing layers of wall paper and again the dark green paint. The doorway into the hall was opened up.

Recommendation – carefully remove wall paper exposing the dark green paint. SAVE large samples of the wall paper and plaster. Remove the textured plaster from the ceiling along with wall paper. It is possible that the ceiling was also painted dark green. See if any large areas of the dark green paint can be preserved.

Hallway

A section of later paneling was removed in the hallway exposing a nice early wall paper. This wall paper is also found underneath later layers of wall paper on the adjacent walls in the hall. Underneath the wall paper is an early green paint with another shade of green paint underneath that. It looks like the hallway, including ceiling, was originally painted light green.



Recommendation - Later wall paper should be carefully removed on the walls to expose the earliest layer where possible. In other areas, the green paint should be exposed if possible. See how much of what can be uncovered and what kind of shape it is in. Then we can make a determination about how to do the restoration. SAVE large samples of all wall paper and any loose plaster that comes off.



Upstairs east Bedrooms

The front bedroom on the second floor of the east addition was examined and seems to not have had a finish coat of plaster applied. This is possibly because it was meant to be wall papered. Several layers of wall paper are present. The ceiling appears to have had a finish coat of plaster and has had a recent coat of textured plaster applied.

The smaller rear bedroom has several layers of wall paper and underneath that is an early orange paint.

Recommendation – Carefully remove the wall paper, trying to get to and identify the first layer. Same with the ceilings. In the rear bedroom, expose as much of the orange paint as possible.

Woodwork Paint

I examined the paint on the wood work in two places with a magnifying glass. One was a piece of trim from the recently opened doorway in the hall. The other was on the wood work around the door in the far west original room that leads to the outside. There were multiple layers of paint on both samples, but in both there was evidence of wood graining as the first or second layer.

Wood graining was widely done on woodwork in houses of the 1850s & 60s period. There is a layer of white paint underneath the wood graining in the west room, indicating that the wood graining of the original house may have been done when the addition was added. I didn't have time to go back and check for a layer of white paint underneath beneath the wood graining in the hallway. The upstairs may or may not have been wood grained as sometimes only the main floor is done.

Recommendation – The woodwork needs to be checked for wood graining in all rooms of the house. Also, try carefully stripping some of the woodwork in a non-prominent place and see if you can take it down a layer at a time to expose the wood graining.

Original House and North Addition Configuration

The configuration of the original house has yet to be determined. Removing the later bathroom in that area will help determine such things as the location of the original stairs to the second floor. An interesting door was uncovered in the west room of the original house. This door opened east toward the main room and is now blocked with plywood. It was added later, probably when the new addition was built. It may have led to a pantry, but needs to be further investigated.



The attic of the north addition needs to be checked for previous chimney openings and construction techniques. The attic above the west room of the original house was checked and a stove chimney opening was found at the peak on the west end of the roof.

Further checking was also done in the basement and crawl space of the original house and in the crawl space of the north addition. There were no signs of a fireplace foundation in either crawl space. There is an opening in the foundation on the north wall of the original house which should be further investigated. There are some short floor joists just above the opening that run perpendicular to the main joists, possibly indicating an architectural feature. Hopefully more will be determined when the modern bathroom is removed and more of the original house is exposed.

Recommendations

1. Continue to carefully remove later materials such as wall paper and the modern bathroom.
2. Save large samples of all wallpaper, plaster and other early materials.
3. Try carefully stripping some of the painted woodwork.
4. Have records been checked such as the Abstract for the date of purchase by Zelus Nettleton and the tax records to help determine the date of the addition? Also are there any Strevell family or business records or newspaper ads from the period that might give clues to the house?

Most of the items on the Further Analysis check list still apply. There was limited time during the September 18th visit and further investigation is needed.

Front Porch

As we discussed, the front porch should have the corners cut and angled to match the porch rooves above. This will give a symmetrical feel to the porch area on the front of the house. One or two wooden stairs can then be added on the porch between the angle cuts.